

Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata*: a new species for Pakistan

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On 11 January 1995 at 09h45 I was leisurely scanning a mangrove creek on Sandspit, just outside Karachi, southern Pakistan. On a fallen branch about 80 m away was a kingfisher that I immediately realised was a Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata*, a species not included in Roberts (1990) and new for Pakistan.

The shape and size of the bird were very like that of White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*. However, the bright red bill was heavier, and the lower mandible was more curved near the tip. The following description was taken: head deep black to below the level of the black eyes and forming a point like a wide V on the back of the neck; collar white; chin and throat white, becoming buffy on lower breast; belly buff; back appeared dark grey in the

prevailing light; a white patch at the base of the primaries seen in flight.

During a period of 16 minutes it changed perches several times and eventually disappeared round a bend in the creek about 0.5 km away.

The species is widespread in India, where some birds wander in winter and it is, therefore, not unexpected in Pakistan.

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Notes on winter birds at Shuangtaihekou National Nature Reserve, Liaoning Province, China

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Shuangtaihekou National Nature Reserve, covering some 80,000 ha at the head of Liaodong Bay, Liaoning, China is situated at about 40°52' to 41°03'N and 121°35' to 121°55'E. It experiences cold winters with an average temperature of -7.8°C, the lowest temperature recorded in Panjin being -29.3°C on 3 February 1964. In mid-winter the ground freezes to a depth of more than 1 m, and the sea freezes for up to several km offshore (Lanzhou Institute of Glaciology and Geocryology 1988). It is thus not surprising that few birds are recorded from the Reserve in mid-winter.

Information on the birds of the Shuangtaihekou National Nature Reserve was summarized by Brazil (1992), based on his observations between 20 April and 30 July 1991, and previous literature. Kanai *et al.* (1993) provide additional information for some species, based on summer observations in the period 1989-1993. Few observations have been made in mid-winter.

The following notes relate to brief observations made on 16, 17 and 20 January 1996 and include northward winter range extensions for a number of species, and one new record for the Reserve. The following list includes all species recorded in January 1996, but should not be considered to be comprehensive because of the very limited amount of time spent in the field.

JAPANESE QUAIL *Coturnix japonica*

Two birds in the West Reserve on 17th and one in the East Reserve on 20th. Cheng (1987) does not record this species wintering north of Shandong. Jin *et al.* (1989, 1991) previously recorded this species as a passage migrant and summer visitor respectively, while Anon. (1991) recorded it as resident. In Liaoning Province it is recorded as a summer visitor and migrant (Liaoning Ornithological Survey Team 1986, Zhao 1988).

HEN HARRIER *Circus cyaneus*

Single birds in the East Reserve on 16th and 20th, and at least three in the West Reserve on 17th. All birds were 'ringtails'. Cheng (1987) does not record this species north of the Yangtze valley in winter, except in eastern and north-eastern Qinghai. It is recorded only as a migrant in Liaoning (Liaoning Ornithological Survey Team 1986, Zhao 1988). Jin *et al.* (1989) recorded this species as resident in the Reserve, but this was subsequently revised to summer visitor (Jin *et al.* 1991), while it was recorded as a passage bird by Anon. (1991). Brazil (1992) noted only three sightings, all in April.

ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD *Buteo lagopus*

At least three in the East Reserve on 16th. Although not recorded for the Reserve by Anon. (1991) and Jin *et al.*

(1989), it was recorded as a passage migrant by Jin *et al.* (1991). The Liaoning Ornithological Survey Team (1986) recorded it as a migrant in the province, whereas it was noted as a migrant and winter visitor by Zhao (1988).

COMMON KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

One or two in the West Reserve on 17th. Cheng (1987) only records this species wintering in southern China. Previously recorded as a passage migrant at the Reserve (Jin *et al.* 1989, 1991, Anon. 1991). The Liaoning Ornithological Survey Team (1986) recorded it as resident in Liaoning, where it was noted as a migrant by Zhao (1988).

ORIENTAL STORK *Ciconia boyciana*

Although not seen at this time, a single bird had been present in the East Reserve earlier in January 1996. It frequented the Zhaoquanhe Management Station where an injured stork was kept in an aviary. Reserve staff provided fish for the wild bird. This is the first record of this species wintering at the Reserve (Li Yu-xiang, unpublished observations). It usually winters along the lower/middle Yangtze valley and further south (Cheng 1987).

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE *Pica pica*

Singles and pairs recorded in both East and West Reserve. Previously recorded as a resident in the Reserve (Anon. 1991, Jin *et al.* 1989, 1991).

DUSKY THRUSH *Turdus naumanni*

A thrush heard calling in the West Reserve on 17th may have been this species, as no other thrush is reported to winter this far north (Wild Bird Society of Japan), although Cheng (1987) does not record this species wintering north of the central Provinces (Anhui, Henan, Hubei, Sichuan). The Dusky Thrush is recorded as a passage migrant in the Reserve by Anon. (1991) and Jin *et al.* 1989, 1991).

VINOUS-THROATED PARROTBILL *Paradoxornis webbiana*

A flock of about 25, together with a few Eurasian Tree Sparrows, in the West Reserve on 17th. This is the first record of this species from the Reserve, but it is known to be widespread in winter throughout Liaoning (Cheng 1987, Liaoning Ornithological Survey Team 1986).

REED PARROTBILL *Paradoxornis heudei*

This species was first recorded from the Reserve in 1991 (Brazil 1992, Jin *et al.* 1991).

Apparently widespread in both East and West Reserve, with groups of 4-6 birds being recorded in all six reedbeds investigated. This situation, however, is a matter for concern. The Reserve encompasses what is claimed to be the largest reed farm in the world (Melville 1991). Reeds *Phragmites australis* are harvested over the winter period and at the time of these observations most areas had been cut. Only small stands of 'high quality' reeds remained in both East and West areas and these were in the process of being cut. Areas of 'poor quality' reeds, with relatively short, thin and sparse stems, remained uncut in both areas of the Reserve. Parrotbills were recorded feeding in both 'high' and 'poor' quality reeds.

Birds perched on the reed stems and fed on items from within the stems, extracting them after cutting through the stem with the powerful bill and occasionally stripping away lengths of stem to gain access to prey inside. At times birds were seen to hold the stem and squeeze it in the

bill, moving up a stem and giving several such squeezes before either extracting a prey item or moving to another stem. A cursory inspection of a few reed stems revealed several very small invertebrate items (unidentified scale insects) in the leaf axils and one grub (c. 5mm long) in a stem. Ma (1988) recorded them feeding principally on scale insects (*Aclerda*) in winter near Shanghai.

The birds fed in loose groups and quite frequently called. Even when not calling the presence of birds could often be determined by the noise of the reed stems being cut/broken open, as also noted by others (LaTouche 1925, Ma 1988). They responded very well to 'pishing'.

The concentration of birds in the relatively few remaining reed patches in mid-winter suggests that feeding habitat at this time may be the major factor limiting the population at this site. The Reed Research Institute of Liaoning and the Reed Farms are continually trying to improve reed yields in the Reserve with the long-term effect of reducing the areas of 'poor quality' reeds. This is likely to lead to a further reduction in reed habitat in mid-winter unless the Reserve authorities are able to negotiate with the Reed Farms to leave some areas uncut, or are able to acquire direct land use control of some reed areas. Currently there is an ad hoc arrangement with the Reed Farms to leave some 'poor quality' areas uncut, and the Reserve authorities are planning to seek funding for acquisition of land use rights of up to 120,000 mu = 7,500 ha of reed beds. If the Reserve is successful in this action it will not only benefit the Parrotbill, but also the Red-crowned Crane *Grus japonensis*, which currently suffers from a lack of standing reeds as nesting cover in the spring (Brazil and Melville 1993).

EURASIAN SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*

Recorded in West Reserve 17th with one flock of c. 45 and others heard. Previously recorded as a winter visitor to the Reserve (Anon. 1991, Jin *et al.* 1989, 1991).

EURASIAN TREE SPARROW *Passer montanus*

Several with the flock of Vinous Parrotbills in the West Reserve 17th. Recorded as a resident on the Reserve (Anon. 1991, Jin *et al.* 1989, 1991).

PALLAS'S BUNTING *Emberiza pallasii*

'Reed' buntings were widespread in both East and West Reserve, with loose flocks of over 60 recorded. The birds frequented both reed beds and more open areas, often feeding on exposed ground where snow had recently melted. Several birds examined in the field were Pallas's Buntings, which previously has been recorded from the Reserve as a common migrant in spring (Brazil 1992, Jin *et al.* 1991). Pallas's Bunting was recorded as a migrant in Liaoning Province (Liaoning Ornithological Survey Team 1986), but there appear to be some wintering records (Cheng 1987, Zhao 1988, Wild Bird Society of Japan 1982).

The Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* was not observed although previously it has been recorded as a winter visitor at the Reserve (Jin *et al.* 1989, Anon. 1991). Cheng (1987), however, only records this species wintering in east and southeast China, south of the Yangtze, and Zhao (1988) records it as a passage migrant in Liaoning. Separation of non-breeding plumage Reed and Pallas's Buntings requires care due to considerable variation in both plumage and structure (Alström and Olsson 1994, Leader 1994) and the identity and status

of reed buntings at the Reserve and elsewhere in eastern China deserves further study.

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The eggs of the Grey-crowned Prinia

Prinia cinereocapilla

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The Grey-crowned Prinia *Prinia cinereocapilla* is said to occur commonly in the eastern Himalayan foothills, but little is known of its habits. Of its nidification almost nothing is known, and the accounts that exist appear to be suspect. Ali and Ripley (1973) merely quote two accounts by Stuart Baker, and nothing seems to have been discovered subsequently. The earlier of the two accounts was from a paper on the birds of Cachar (Baker, 1894, p. 15):

'Very rare indeed. I have taken five nests which were quite indistinguishable from those of *F[ranklinia] gracilis* and the eggs were all a pure skim-milk blue, rather lighter in shade than those of *F. gracilis* and also less glossy. In shape they are rather broad regular ovals, one or two being lengthened. My last specimen was taken in July 1890, and since then I have seen no others. Ten eggs average .59 x .42".'

However, Baker does not seem to have had much faith in the authenticity of these eggs for he retained none of them. The only eggs of this species in Baker's collection when it was received by The Natural History Museum are two referred to in Baker (1933). Since he said that these were the only known eggs of the species, Baker had apparently forgotten the eggs he previously collected and attributed to this species. These earlier eggs were

presumably collected in Cachar in 1890, and a single egg which is almost certainly one of them, was received in The Natural History Museum with the collection of J. Davidson: the whereabouts of the remaining eggs does not seem to be known. (The Davidson collection contained one other egg attributed to this species which will be discussed later). The Cachar egg was apparently given by Baker to Lieut. H. E. Barnes; on Barnes's death his entire collection was purchased by Davidson and incorporated with his own. This egg is stated to have been collected in 1890 at Dunjunmakh, Gurjong, N. Cachar, and Barnes in his MS catalogue described it as 'pale, unspotted blue in colour. Damaged.' The egg is indeed slightly damaged, and to my eyes very pale blue in colour, paler than the two eggs in Baker's collection.

According to the MS catalogue of Baker's collection, these latter were collected by Mr J. Shillingford in the 'Nepal terai, Bengal, India', but his published account (Baker 1933) stated that they were collected in the 'Bhutan Dooars' in Assam/West Bengal. The eggs were collected with the nest and the bird, Baker commenting, in manuscript, in his catalogue: 'The very tattered remains of the bird were, I think, correctly identified as of the species.' From this it